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XINGHUN: A “COOPERATIVE MARRIAGE” TIES CHINESE
LESBIANS AND GAYS

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Special Term

Xinghun(形婚): It is the abbreviation of *xingshihunyun*, in which *xingshi* means “format” and *hunyun* means “marriage.” Literally, *xinghun* should be translated as “format marriage” or “formative marriage” because such marriage is just a form without content. If considered essentially, such marriage is actually a contract and cooperation between two people (or family), so *xinghun* is translated as “contract marriage” or “cooperative marriage.” In China, *xinghun* is specific for marriage that gays and lesbians involve, including marriage between a gay and a lesbian, and marriage between a LGBT people and a straight.¹

Lianyin(联姻): It means marriage of convenience in English. It is more general than *xinghun*. It means the marriage between two interest groups, for example the marriage between the prince of A state and the princess of B state. *Lianyin* is usually connected with political and economic interests.

Tongzhi(同志): Comrade, Chinese homosexual people (LGBT). It first appeared in Hong Kong in the 1980’s, then spread over Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and other oversea Chinese LGBT communities. It origins from a famous saying of Sun Yet-san, “*Geming shangwei chenggong, tongzhi rengxu nuli* (Revolution is not done yet. Comrades still have a lot to do. “革命尚未成功，同志仍需努力”) However, in mainland China, *tongzhi* remains its political image under leadership of CCP. CCP uses *tongzhi* as a common suffix, so it may be rare to hear *tongzhi* that represents homosexuals or LGBT in newspapers or news broadcast, while the word *tongzhi* is popular on the Internet.

Tongxinglian(同性恋): The term *tongxinglian* is from the book *Tongxing'ai* written by Zhang Bei-chuan in 1995, who is a LGBT and AIDS professional of Qingdao University.

Lala(拉拉): Chinese Lesbians.

Niangniangqiang(娘娘腔): Feminine males (usually coming-up with disdain)

Nanrenpo(男人婆): Manful females (coming-up with disdain as well)

Jiating(家庭)/Jia(家): Family and home.

Fucizixiao(父慈子孝): Parents love their sons and daughters. Sons and daughters are filial to parents.

Chugui(出柜): Coming-out of the closet.

Tongqi(同妻)/Tongfu(同夫): *Tongqi* means straight women who marry to gay men;

¹ After researching with different translations, I decided to use “cooperative marriage” as the primary choice because it is the most prevalent one, no matter on the Internet or in academic works. Other translations also appear in some academic articles, while not as popular as “cooperative marriage.”

tongfu means straight men who marry to lesbian women.

Kongtong(恐同): Homophobic

Fenziqian (份子钱): The lucky money received from the guests in the wedding ceremony.

Zeren (责任): Responsibility

Weibo (微博): Chinese twitter developed by the Internet service company, Sina.

Xiao(孝)/***Xiaodao*** (孝道): Filial piety

Shengnü(剩女): Leftover women

Introduction

In modern China, although the normality of homosexuality has been officially admitted, misconception and discrimination against homosexuals are still prevalent in the mainstream of Chinese society. Chinese LGBT people endure two main sources of pressure: one is from the external and another is from the internal. From the outside, Chinese LGBT people bear the suppression made by the normality of sexual orientation and the hegemonic culture of heterosexuality, in particular heterosexual marriage. And such discrimination is still occurring now in our society. LGBT people themselves are heavily tortured by the pain and pressure of self-denial. A lot of them cannot both insist upon their rights and survive under such mental pressure, and thus choose to compromise and marry the opposite gender. Heterosexual marriage practiced by homosexuals is authorized by Chinese law, but it only has a form, or appearance of marriage. It does not have the content. It is only a paper marriage that is a tool used for some purposes. In this article, I will discuss and explore the question: how can a long-standing tradition in Chinese culture—cooperative marriage—advance the safe space, social welfare, and civic status of LGBTQ people individually in China?

Methodology

I used the USF library and JSTOR as my databases. Searching useful journals and books is very convenient through use of the Internet. When typing “cooperative marriage” in Google search, thousands of pieces of information jump out.² I have considered using another database, which is the Chinese Academy of Social Science. Professor Li Yin-he³ has published her first academic paper on a journal of

² One needs time to identify and categorize the information. Data is the element that concerns me a lot.

³ Yin-he Li is a famous scholar and social activist who focuses on LGBTQ social movement in China. She has suggested several times in the conference of House of People’s Representative that China should legalize same-sex marriage as soon as possible.

homosexuality. Nevertheless what I have realized is in the USF online database, the information of LGBT's marriage life seems missing. So, I turned to looking for both academic and non-academic articles through Chinese websites. It is not easy to find proper quantitative data instead of qualitative. Fortunately, after paid some register fees, I can read and download some academic journals from <http://gb.oversea.cnki.net>, which is a sharing platform of Chinese academic works that include peer-reviewed journals, articles of graduated students, published works and etc. Moreover, since much information is neither academic nor official, framing and positioning are pivotal as well, like media discourse analysis such as online message board and narrative analysis like interviews. I found an article of "cooperative marriage" in South Korea. But China has its own "cooperative marriage" issue. This paper analyzed through comparison among different perspectives. Listening to different voices is quite important, not only in academia but in daily lives. Nonetheless, comparison could lead to a severe question: where is your own voice? Or you have own voice but you are not aggressive enough to show your idea to readers, because your voice is covered by tons of resources in your paper. I am trying to list both positive and negative sides of "cooperative marriage." I also need to appreciate my interviewee, B and Y⁴ who offer me the live voices of Chinese LGBT people.

Literature Review

In China, the special term used to represent "cooperative marriage" within the LGBT community is written as *xinghun*⁵. *Xinghun* is the abbreviation of *xingshi hunyin*. *Xingshi* means a form or a shape. *Hunyin* means marriage. Literally, *xinghun* is translated as "format marriage," and, thus, researches on this topic can be found in

⁴ B is my college-mate; we have been knowing each other for around six years. Y and me met online, in a fan club of an idol group. Surprisingly, Y agreed to make a phone interview.

⁵ *Xinghun*'s Chinese characters are written as 形婚

some academic works under this term. From the English expression, “Marriage of convenience” is translated as *lianyin*⁶ or *xinghun*. “Cooperative marriage” is the more popular term used among Chinese LGBTQ peoples.⁷ Here, a “fake marriage of homosexuals” refers to a gay couple and a lesbian couple who plan and arrange two fake marriages that culminate in the marriage of one gay to one lesbian.

In the journal *Off Our Backs*, vol.17 posted an article “Chinese lesbians and gays in cities” in 1987, which mentioned a popular publication of homosexuality in Beijing in 1985. In the 1980s, China has already absorbed much new knowledge from the West. Homosexuality, translated as *tongzhi*⁸ in Chinese, arrived in the capital Beijing and Shanghai. As similar as the West, new ideas usually spread over through universities. College students at that time were engaged by such fresh thinking. However, homosexual activities, especially practicing male homosexual behaviors would be put into jail under the name of hooliganism.⁹ Some people were even put into death or sent to mental hospitals. Until 1997, homosexuality in post-Mao China was highly problematic in the eyes of mainstream society, but when scholar Zhang Bei-chuan published his book *Homosexual Love* in 1994, which shocked Chinese society in the way that homosexuality was not a mental disease but an emotional state.¹⁰ Many academic journals have assumed that Confucianism is an obstacle on the path of legalizing same-sex marriage, no matter in self-recognition as

⁶ 联姻 is the Chinese character of *lianyin*.

⁷ Kam, Lucetta Yip Lo. *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012) p84.

⁸ See “Special Terms” in the beginning of this article.

⁹ http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/17/content_4680.htm The Amendment of Criminal Law Of the People’s Republic of China has deleted “hooliganism” in 1997. And in 2001, Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders has redefined that homosexuality was no longer a mental disorder. These two events has clarified that homosexuality was neither a crime, nor a disease.

¹⁰In 1997, several years after Zhang has published his book, with great effort made by many researchers and scientists put more focus on LGBT group, hooliganism has been repealed in Criminal Law. Not only Zhang Bei-chuan, but also another scholar Li Yin-he wrote a book named *Subculture of Homosexuality* in 1998 about homosexuals, she helped Chinese people to understand what is homosexuality and such relationship is another kind of romantic love that has a long history since ancient dynasties.

a gay¹¹ or play as an “invisible hand” to push Chinese LGBT people to choose heterosexual marriage.¹² While in the article “Same-sex Marriage in China? The Strategic Promulgation of a Progressive Policy and Its Impact on LGBT Activism.” written by Timothy Hildebrandt, used Taiwan and Singapore as two counter-examples to illustrate that Confucianism was not as strong as imagined, because “many traditional practices have been eroded as the result of economic development and sometimes by government design.”¹³ The weight of Confucianism or traditional ideology should put into re-consideration, though Confucianism does orchestra behaviors of Chinese people. Hildebrandt also justifies that homosexuality is surprisingly tolerated in China, because China does not have a very rigid religious environment to apply anti-homosexuality.¹⁴ However, in article “Acceptance Concern and Life Satisfaction for Chinese LGBs: The Mediating Role of Self-Concealment” points out that the ideology of “being normal” is driving the Chinese LGBT people crazy because they are afraid of being different.¹⁵ Developing from Hu and etc, such fear is a good promotion of *xinghun* to some lesbians and gays who may have heavier concern of how they will be judged by others. What I have assumed is because of the lower acceptance and high-emotional cost of coming out, many lesbians and gays choose “cooperative marriage” to protect themselves. The fear of being disdained and condemned by their families and the public locks their doors.

Refuse “Cooperative Marriage”

“Indeed, marriage of convenience is a kind of surrender and compromise of

¹¹ Sun, Zhongxin, James Farrer and Kyung-hee Choi. “Sexual Identity Among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Shanghai.”(French Center for Research on Contemporary China:2006) p4.

¹² Liang, Junhua, Jing Yang. “Analyze Types and Reasons of ‘Formative Marriage.’” (Beijing:2008) p176.

¹³ Hildebrandt, Timothy. “Same-sex Marriage in China? The Strategic Promulgation of a Progressive Policy and Its Impact on LGBT Activism.” (London: 2011) p1320.

¹⁴ Ibid.p1318.

¹⁵Hu, Xiaowen. etc. “Acceptance Concern and Life Satisfaction for Chinese LGBs: The Mediating Role of Self-Concealment.” (Australia: 2012) p688-689.

homosexual to heterosexual hegemony. Marriage of convenience seems easy, in fact, it can cause a lot of problems, like problems of supporting old people, economic problem and etc. All of these problems have been troubling the homosexuals who choose marriage of convenience.”¹⁶

“Cooperative marriages” usually involve interests -- political, economic, and etc. As in *xinghun*, one gay and one lesbian, due to family pressure, make a several-year plan of *xinghun*. On the one hand, coming-out is like mission impossible in China. To some homosexuals, to enter into *xinghun* is to live a beautiful lie, but one that is like a time bomb. The uncertainty of the future could cause possible emotional instability, through fear, guilt, regret and pain. Another issue is the life after marriage. According to the Chinese New Marriage Law, all the properties including cars and real estates purchased before the marriage by himself or herself, if couple did do property notarization before marriage, all properties would be separated into half and half, no matter who paid.¹⁷¹⁸ When money is involved, something could change. Some *xinghun* couples have quarrels about money. D, whose parents have already met his “girlfriend’s” family, struggled with how much should the bridegroom pay, and how much should the bride spend on the wedding ceremony. D says, “We agree to pay 80,000 RMB, (about 12,000 USD) but her mother wants herself to keep the money not us (my parents). My parents are not happy about this.”¹⁹ D is not the only one who involved money issue. Another example is about who should have the *fenziqian*²⁰ received from the guests. S, a married lesbian shared her story. “We (S and her gay husband) decided to separate both costs and *fenziqian* into half and half.

¹⁶ Peng, Tianxiao. “The Reasons and Effects of Chinese Homosexual Choosing Marriage of Convenience.” (Beijing: 2014) p97.

¹⁷ “China’s New Marriage Law.” *Population and Development Review*, Vol.7, No.2 (Beijing: Population Council, 1981) http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/lfzt/rlys/2014-10/24/content_1882723.htm

¹⁸ China’s Marriage Law was first issued in 1950. Then, China’s New Marriage Law was passed in 1981. The first amendment of China’s New Marriage Law was practiced in 2001. The statutory interpretation of the New Marriage Law was published in 2011. The “China’s New Marriage Law” discussed in this article includes the statutory interpretation published by the Supreme Court of PRC.

¹⁹ Liu, Jiaxin. “To Explore *Xinghun* Among Homosexual People.” (Wuhan: 2016) p25.

²⁰ See “Special Terms” in the beginning of this article.

My mother took all the *fenziqian* and deposited it into her bank account. She promised that she would give to us if we really need it in some day. But he didn't trust my parents. He believed my mother would use it, so he kept asking my parents to give back his half." S was very angry. Although S's mother gave back the money, this thing would live in S and her husband's hearts and never die.²¹

Picking information from a LGBT message board, lesbians and gays who carefully arrange cooperative marriages are usually in their thirties. A part of LGBT people especially who are at twenties, oppose to *xinghun*.²² LGBT people who are at this age were born either at the end of 1980's and the beginning of 1990's. This is an important time period to China, politically, economically and culturally. In politics, Deng Xiaoping who was the chairman then, proclaimed a new policy that is "Reform and Re-opening up."²³ This policy re-opened the market of China to the world. Not only foreign investment came, but also the new information came. This generation grew up in an open market and an open environment. The older generations were living in a planned economy, but the younger generation lives in a market economy that prefers free competition. Comparing to the older generations, they are more free and brave to express their ideas. They question and challenge the traditions. Another issue concern lesbians to arrange *xinghun* is the fear of being treated horribly by their husbands. Females are vulnerable, no matter physically or judicially. The patriarchy structure of Confucianism privileges men above women not only in China but also in South Korea. The patriarchy family could generate the gendered subordination of the

²¹ Liu, Jiaxin. "To Explore *Xinghun* Among Homosexual People." (Wuhan: 2016) p30.

²² Lao, Ou. "Formal Marriage In LGBT Group." *Gender Diversity: Thesis and Practice*. (Taiwan: Wanyou Publish.Co., 2012) p437.

²³ "Reform and Re-opening up" has two steps. One is reform; and another is re-opening. Reform part is from 1978-1989. Re-opening is from 1989 to 1992. The LGBT people I mention here were born in the Re-opening period, but also include who were born after 1992 until 1997.

female partners.²⁴ A lesbian posted online: “To gay men, women are just women, no matter lesbians or straight women. The difference is only ‘useful’ or ‘useless.’ He (the gay husband) would use any ways for his purpose. (like violence or to rape his wife) It happens.”²⁵ This post mentions a critical perspective is that “cooperative marriage” is not protected by the law. Although the gay husband and the lesbian wife have reached some agreements, even sign a contract before their marriage, some people might not follow the rules.²⁶ A gay requires his lesbian wife should not be a *Nanrenpo*²⁷, otherwise he would feel losing face. He must have an offspring, or he is irresponsible to his parents. After the baby was born, he wants to divorce and let his wife to take care of the baby. He only needs to pay monthly, then he is free and can go back to the gay circle.²⁸ It is no wonder why the lesbian says that gays want “useful” lesbian wife, because they can skirt their social responsibility through throwing the family to their wives. Such worries or even fear originates from the deep-rooted gender inequality in China. As mentioned before, the Chinese New Marriage Law writes that all properties purchased by either one would be separated into half and half after they divorced, if they did not do a notarization before their marriage.²⁹ To women who have the ownership of properties, their husbands and even husbands’ mothers ask to add the name of husbands on the house property certificate. The reason is simple, because these women are middle-upper class who have more than one house. These sons and

²⁴ Cho, John Song Pae. “The Wedding Banquet Revisited: ‘Contract Marriage’ between Korean Gays and Lesbians” (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:2009) p402.

²⁵ See <https://www.zhihu.com/question/31968153/answer/55043777> Accessed on April 9th. 2017. The original Chinese text of this part is “对于 GAY 来说，女人就是女人，无所谓 LES 或直女，无非就是能利用又或是不能利用...更别提他可能会为了生育而不择手段（家暴或强奸妻子），这种案例也不是没有。” The full original Chinese text locate in the Bibliography.

²⁶ Ibid. The original Chinese context is: “法律不承认形婚，L E S 和 G A Y 的形婚协议没有半点法律效力和保障，就算是事先说好了，人家婚后就是不遵守你能拿他怎样?”

²⁷ See “Special Terms” in the beginning of this article.

²⁸ Chen, Yaya. “Marriage and Family of Lesbians Challenge the Traditional System of Marriage.” (China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House. 2009) p115.

²⁹ “China’s New Marriage Law.” *Population and Development Review*, Vol.7, No.2 (Beijing: Population Council, 1981) http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/lfzt/rllys/2014-10/24/content_1882723.htm

mothers believe that women and their properties should belong to their husbands.³⁰ To the man owners, this amendment of law could reinforce the gender stereotype that claims women are weak in earning money. No matter who is the free-rider, this method is not fair to the one who purchased his or her own properties. So far, a clear standard of identifying who is “safe to practice cooperative marriage” is still not established. An interesting phenomenon, which in some academic works, so far not many scholars truly “recommend” homosexuals to involve in cooperative marriages.³¹ This is because they know that the difficulty of sustaining a “cooperative marriage” could not be easier than coming out of the closet. The negative effects of “cooperative marriage” are what concern Chinese LGBT people. Once involved in “cooperative marriage”, the issues would go far beyond a lie.

Reproduction

Not only money, but also children and reproduction is an issue. Once people are married, parents usually expect a baby in the next several years. Though gays and lesbians who are involved in *xinghun* could have babies through the use of “test-tube baby” (artificial insemination), or adoption³², but what may happen afterwards could be challenges. How to educate their babies? As children growing up, should *xinghun* parents confess or seal the fact of *xinghun*? Some parents may ask to live with these young couples especially after they have had a baby. How might these “fake” couples hide and protect themselves from relatives and parents’ questioning and caring? In China, unless a couple explain clearly why they want to be DINK, (Double Income No Kids) a lot of parents would push young couples to have kids everyday, until finally they agree to give birth to babies. “I really don’t know what to do.” says A, a thirty-

³⁰ Fincher, Leta Hong. *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*. (University of Chicago Press: 2016)

³¹ Among the sources I have founded about *xinghun*, only two authors demonstrate that Chinese LGBT people can do *xinghun* and work hard to keep it. Others are either “No, you can’t” or “You would better not do that.”

³² Not many people prefer adoption because they want their own bloodline to be continued.

eight-year-old married gay. “Me and my wife agreed not have a baby before we married, because we don’t like children and we think it [showing homosexual behaviors before children] is not good to children. But my parents kept pushing me to see doctors. They thought one of us may have problems...I can’t afford a baby by myself. She won’t agree to have a baby.”³³ Some *tongzhi* even break up with their girlfriends or boyfriends because of the reproduction issue. After J broke up with her ex-girlfriend, (they had a ten-year relationship) J told her mother that she is a lesbian, but her mother didn’t believe. When asked why she wanted to practice *xinghun*, J said “I was born as a *lala*³⁴, but I need to apply my responsibility. I am running a family business. My parents want a child to inherit our wealth, no matter what gender. Plus, I am the only child in my family. Even though I broke up with her, I could find a new one, but I must have a child.”³⁵ Having a descendant is a large part of filial piety. Due to this reason, many couples think they have to have kids. In “cooperative marriages”, not only to gays, but more to lesbians, giving birth to a baby who is not your and your partner’s is usually unreasonable. Even though the baby was born, how to educate and raise the child is another problem.

After a *xinghun* family had a child, should they keep their secret or tell their child that there is no romantic relation between his or her father and mother? Z, a married gay who has a ten-year-old son, felt lost. “My son is ten-year-old. He always asks me why dad doesn’t sleep with mom. We..don’t know should we confess to him or not. He is growing. He will know *tongxinglian* in some day. Some of my friends suggested we should confess, but others suggested don’t do that.”³⁶ F, whose friend practiced *xinghun*, said “I was shocked by his [her gay friend] decision. You are

³³ Liu, Jiaxin. “To Explore *Xinghun* Among Homosexual People.” (Wuhan: 2016) p30.

³⁴ See “Special Terms” in the beginning of this article.

³⁵ Wang, Yingyi. “Explore Cooperative Marriage: What Motive *Tongzhi*.” (Hong Kong:2014) p15.

³⁶ Ibid.p32.

involving a marriage! Protected by the law! I told him! But he still insisted marrying to his wife.” Since F is a doctor, her gay friend asked her questions about how to bear a baby. “It is easy to bear a baby” said F, “But I worry about the future of this child. They may neglect their child and let their parents to take care of their son or daughter. A child growing up without any love from parents? That’s sad.”³⁷ Another father AS³⁸ said, “I feel guilty to my son. He would think I am not a responsible father.”³⁹ The same to the thirty-eight-old-father A mentioned previously. The reason why they have such concerns is these *xinghun tongzhi* are not open enough to accept their true sexual orientation. They still believe that *tongxinglian* is not proper behavior, so they do not want to expose themselves. Like AS said, *tongxinglian* means not responsible to his son and he is afraid that his son knows his secret. A believes showing homosexuality in front of his child is not appropriate. Why? Only heterosexuals can carry the family and be responsible? Only heterosexuality is “appropriate?” Even under the high internal and external pressure, they never abandoned their families. AS concerns that the social tolerance of *tongxinglian* could remain high while his son is growing up. His concern might be true, but how would he know that his son can not accept him? If both A and AS could teach their children knowledge and stories of homosexual and educate them that homosexual is preference and a choice, their concern may not be a concern.

The pressure of having a decedent is quite high especially under the one-child policy. Chinese LGBT people endure a lot. “One chance at raising a child who meets all the expectations of parents put enormous burdens on gays and lesbians, keeping

³⁷ Liu, Jiaxin. “To Explore *Xinghun* Among Homosexual People.” (Wuhan: 2016) p34.

³⁸ All names here are the initial of their first names.

³⁹ Zhao, Yuchen. “The Exploration of Chinese Homosexuals Pursue Heterosexual Marriage Under the Angle of Family.” (Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University, 2014) p27

them in the closets and contributing to high rates of depression and suicide.”⁴⁰ However, at the end of the year 2015, Chinese government ended the one-child policy, and started the new two-children policy. Dr. Timothy Hilderbrandt claims that the end of one-child policy could ease the pressure of the only child in the family, who happened to be gay or lesbian or other sexual minorities.⁴¹ Their parents can bear another baby. In stead of pushing the LGBT child, the parents could switch their focus to the second child. Since the LGBT child refuses to marry and have a baby, the family pressure transfers automatically to his or her siblings, and parents put more attention to the heterosexual child (or children). However, this policy made by the government considers more about the demographic pressure than human rights. The pressure of giving birth to one baby might switch to two babies. If parents of LGBT children were too aging to bear babies, parents would still push and urge LGBT children to marry and bring them two grandchildren. In this case, family pressure would remain. This policy could not permanently solve the problem. So many problems may happen in the unstable future, so contract marriage could not be the final goal of homosexuals, but instead, it is only a beginning of more complicated problems. However, a coin has two sides.

Accept “Cooperative Marriage”

In the previous part, I have illustrated the disadvantages of *xinghun*. If *xinghun* is totally negative, why there still a lot of *tongzhi* choose *xinghun*? First of all, the concept of family means a lot to Chinese people. They look forward to the life of “*fucizixiao* (good father and filial son) that has great difference with Western culture.” A family is not only the basic unit of Chinese society, but it is also the

⁴⁰ *South China Morning Post* <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1877010/end-chinas-one-child-policy-will-ease-pressure-gays-and> (Hong Kong:2015)

⁴¹ Ibid.

foundation of the whole country. Since Zhou Dynasty⁴²⁴³, Chinese people have taken kinship seriously. Family, or home, is the place where people are raised, as well as a place that provides emotional sustenance. A family, in Chinese people's eyes, is as important as a state. Chinese people believe that, only when each small family is stable will the state as a larger family, be stable as well.⁴⁴ There is a famous chapter in the Confucianism book *Great Learning*,⁴⁵ "Regulate the family" places before "Maintain the State Rightly."⁴⁶ This proves that family is the basic unit of a state. If one can carry his or her family, then he or she is able to administrate the state as well. Otherwise one does not have a family or not regulate family well means one is not eligible to run the country. Thus, Chinese people take marriage so seriously that Chinese people view marriage at the first and primary accomplishment or life goal.⁴⁷⁴⁸ Once decided, they hardly make changes. In the large social context, family is even more pivotal than the country or the society. Moreover, family can overwhelm individuals.⁴⁹ To Chinese people, what they must have is a family, a home.⁵⁰ To some *tongzhi*, marriage means responsibility. "Marriage is being responsible to your parents, your family, and yourself. It is a path that everyone must pass." "This is *zeren*."⁵¹ A never married person won't understand that."⁵² When

⁴² The concept of family could start as early as neolithic period. In Zhou Dynasty (roughly from 11 century BCE to 256 BCE), feudalism associated with the family. 154 BCE, Han Dynasty was believed the last to have feudalism, but after the Rebellion of the Seven States, feudalism disappeared and central authority was largely enhanced. After that, Confucianism, which emphasizes the hierarchy of family, started its thousands of years of monopoly in China.

⁴³ Yang, Kuan. *History of the Western Zhou Dynasty*. (People's Publication in Shanghai: 2016) p297-316.

⁴⁴ Zhao, Yuchen. "The Exploration of Chinese Homosexuals Pursue Heterosexual Marriage Under the Angle of Family." (Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University, 2014) p12.

⁴⁵ The Chinese name of this book is *daxue*, 大学. It is one of the Four Books of Confucianism.

⁴⁶ "Regulate the family" is written as 齐家 (*qijia*). "Maintain the State Rightly" is written as 治国 (*zhiguo*).

⁴⁷ Li, Dongmei and Zhang, Junli. "The Comparison Between Chinese and Western Ideology of Family." (Hohhot: Inner Mongolia Industrial University, 2008)

⁴⁸ In other cultures, marriage could also be the purpose of life, but since this paper mainly focus on China, I write this sentence.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p5.

⁵⁰ Li, Dongmei and Zhang, Junli. "The Comparison Between Chinese and Western Ideology of Family." (Hohhot: Inner Mongolia Industrial University, 2008) p3.

⁵¹ See "Special Terms" in the beginning of this article.

⁵² Kam, Lucetta Yip Lo. *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China*. (Hong

someone married, it represents that he or she is an fully adult who can take his or her family and social responsibility. After married, a family is formed. When one is single, one only need to consider oneself. However, when people walk in marriage, situation changes. Like the quotation illustrates, single persons do not understand what does marriage mean to human beings and society. One has one's family on one's shoulder. One needs to take care of one's family, not just oneself. In many societies, married people would receive more social welfare and enjoy higher social status, and even could climb faster than those who are single, in the hierarchy of a company.⁵³ The gay husband W married to his lesbian wife B. W is working at a state-owned enterprise, and his boss and manager all know B. W says, "In a state-owned enterprise, a lot of them are conventional. They don't consider single persons especially when some important 'missions' come...When you are building up your social network, bring your wife with you. You would get much more closer to your clients and your boss..through talking about your family and kids."⁵⁴ Another example could illustrate this point is Huashi⁵⁵. Huashi serves in the army. In the military, if a soldier was not married, he or she might not enjoy the welfare, which is he or she can receive an free apartment from the army.⁵⁶ As Peng claims⁵⁷, there are three out of four reasons why homosexuals choose "cooperative marriages." One, gay people are think their coming-out will hurt parents' health, especially elderly parents who have health issues. Second, they are afraid of making their parents angry and getting kicked out of the house, especially teenager homosexuals who are not economically independent. Third, they worry how parents should face their relatives

Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012) p122.

⁵³ Wang, Yingyi. "Explore Cooperative Marriage: What Motive *Tongzhi*." (Hong Kong:2014) p16.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Huashi is a gay and he is looking for a lesbian to make a *xinghun*.

⁵⁶ Lao, Ou. "Formal Marriage In LGBT Group." (Taiwan: Wanyou Publish.Co. 2012.) p433.

⁵⁷ Peng, Tianxiao. "The Reasons and Effects of Chinese Homosexual Choosing Marriage of Convenience." (Beijing: 2014) p98.

and other family members. These reasons are associated with parents. It is said that people should live their own lives, but this argument references and emphasize on the individual shared by many societies world wide. What parents face is not only sexual orientation of their sons and daughters but also they have to face relatives, neighbors, and even ancestors. This is one important characteristic of traditional Chinese culture, which is named “pan-familism” by scholars.⁵⁸ In China however, *xiaodao*⁵⁹ is the social convention that people may not circumvent without consequences. So, the demand of *xinghun* spurs a market of online matchmaking that provides services of consulting.

Online Matchmaking of *Xinghun*

The advertisement of looking for someone to “cooperate” a marriage prevails on the Internet. People can find such advertisement on www.tianya.cn, which is a BBS (bulletin board system), or a website that designed as a gay-les matchmaking platform.



⁵⁸ Wang, Qingfeng. “Self-recognized Without ‘Coming-out.’” (Beijing: 2011) p145.

⁵⁹ See “Special Terms” at the beginning of this article.

<p>Form of marriage news</p> <p>We all need to live the point of 2017-05-16</p> <p>Twenty years old youth is used to get out of poverty 2017-05-16</p> <p>Half of the life is to fight half is happiness 2017-05-16</p> <p>Woman can not marry a man can not marry 2017-05-16</p> <p>Life can give you are your own choice 2017-05-16</p> <p>The more you feel the her difference 2017-05-16</p> <p>Do not dress up a woman is not cherish you 2017-05-16</p> <p>EQ and IQ related? 2017-05-16</p> <p>Flash marriage is the choice of fashion or performance 2017-05-16</p> <p>A man does not love your 2017-05-16</p>	<p>Form a marriage story</p> <p>Why is the family so many contradictio 2017-05-16</p> <p>If people are old who can count on? 2017-05-16</p> <p>How is a step by step become narrow 2017-05-16</p> <p>long what happened 2017-05-16</p> <p>Most of the living pit is digging their own 2017-05-16</p> <p>The life is today 2017-05-16</p> <p>Life is not only about the starting line 2017-05-16</p> <p>Respect for others is respect for their own 2017-05-16</p> <p>not the standard of assessment 2017-05-16</p> <p>Why do you have a new life 2017-05-16</p>
<p>Form of marriage</p> <p>whether you are a weak 2017-05-16</p> <p>kind to others to be able to live this life 2017-05-16</p> <p>Life but a "degree" word 2017-05-16</p> <p>Looking for a free-living 2017-05-16</p> <p>Keep to be old 2017-05-16</p> <p>Low-key talent is really "luxury" 2017-05-16</p> <p>You are afraid of blind date is anxious life 2017-05-16</p> <p>Why do you care about the between 2017-05-16</p> <p>All the good end of the disaster wa 2017-05-16</p> <p>Do not easily "look " anybody 2017-05-16</p>	<p>Form marriage related</p> <p>People nothing will be no income homes 2017-05-16</p> <p>"Filial and not " parents 2017-05-16</p> <p>Some youth has not yet begun to end 2017-05-16</p> <p>How do men face the pattern and ending of life 2017-05-16</p> <p>Smile is good for your own way 2017-05-16</p> <p>Who will love you life 2017-05-16</p> <p>thinking of the people are not happy 2017-05-16</p> <p>Naked marriage guess really happy or poor 2017-05-16</p> <p>What is emotional e 2017-05-16</p> <p>The people around you decide your life 2017-05-16</p>

As scholars and researchers estimate, China has around twenty to thirty million LGBT people.⁶⁰ As this matchmaking web claiming that it has 400 thousand users, the percentage of LGBT people consider *xinghun* (using this website) is between 1.3% to 2%. And there are 49601⁶¹ successful cases as the web claims, then the percentage of succeeded *xinghun* couples is 11.99%⁶². This website is not the only matchmaking website. When type in “*xinghun wangzhan*”⁶³ in the Google, a half of the first page is different *xinghun* websites. As early as 2002, sociology scholar Li Yin-he pointed out that one difference between Chinese LGBT people and the Western LGBT people is the majority of Chinese LGBT people will marry.⁶⁴ 57.3% Chines LGBT people who received survey, are already or ready to accept

⁶⁰ Liu, Min. “Two Gay Men Seeking Two Lesbians: An Analysis of *Xinghun* (Formality Marriage) Ads on China’s *Tianya.cn*.” (New York: 2013) p494.

⁶¹ By the time I accessed the website, there are 49601 successful pairs out of 413344 registered members.

⁶² The calculation is 49601 divided by 413344.

⁶³ *Wangzhan* means “website” in English. Its Chinese characters are written as 网站.

⁶⁴ Chen, Yaya. “Marriage and Family of Lesbians Challenge the Traditional System of Marriage.” (China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House: 2009) p107.

heterosexual marriage [*xinghun*]. 20% of these LGBT people answered “must marry” and “already married.”⁶⁵ When there is a demand, there is a supply. Not only Chinese LGBT people demand “cooperative marriage”, but the society need it to decorate and behave “normal.” The eagerness of hetero-normality comes from the lower social tolerance of LGBT people. A part of them want to act like a “normal” person, not an “abnormal” person who is different from the majority. The lower social tolerance of LGBT in China influences and stimulates the market of *xinghun*, which works not a marriage that is a social contract, but more like a special service. Although China right now the tolerance towards LGBT is not as polarized into two camps as the United States is, however only 20% of Chinese who took the survey believe homosexuality is “totally fine”, which is lower than the U.S that has 43%. 30% of these Chinese people think homosexuality is “a little bit wrong”; and 37% of Chinese believe homosexuality is totally wrong, which is still lower than the U.S that has 47%.⁶⁶ The ambiguous attitude towards homosexuality leads some Chinese LGBT people choose *xinghun*. Only 20% of the interviewed group shows positive attitude to homosexuality, which could not be a strong support for Chinese LGBT people to *chugui*. In the survey question “Have you ever met homosexuals around you?” only 7.5% of people answered yes. The low visibility of homosexuality is the consequence of the lower social tolerance of homosexuality. Animals, include human beings, have the instinct of sheltering themselves from the unknown. This is what the *xinghun* website works. It helps Chinese LGBT people to find someone who have similar concerns and situations to build up a safe space for them. So, a small market and commercialization of *xinghun* has shown up. *Xinghun* is a shell that covers and blocks the possible hurts from the outside. Thus, *xinghun* was born to satisfy the

⁶⁵ Ibid. The scale of this survey is 2600 Chinese LGBT people.

⁶⁶ Li, Yin-he, Hongxia Zheng. “Public Attitude towards Homosexuality and Reasons Influence.” (Journal of South China Normal University: 2013) p32.

requests of fulfilling filial piety, marrying to an opposed gender, and having a family.

Discussion

It is been a while I have not talked to B, after she broke up with her ex-girlfriend. Their story is famous in our circle, because they did not hide their relationship and sexual orientation. Personally, I really appreciate her courage. Here are some thoughts from her.⁶⁷

We seemed to avoid such topic of cooperative marriage, because we know we may not be lucky enough to marry to each other. I remember one time, when we were having a chatting and sitting on the bed, she suddenly asked me, ‘Hey, if I could marry to a rich guy, and you could be my lover. Would that be cool?’ I didn’t say yes, and I didn’t say no. I said that let me think about it. She didn’t really care my answer, I guess. Her mother, threatened her. ‘If you were a *tongxinglian*, I would jump out of our house. The apartment locates on the nineteenth floor, by the way. I guess this is the reason why she wants to find a guy to marry to. *Xiao* is a heavy cangue that burden us, but we can’t skirt it. It is there. You can’t run away.

I have not had a chance to talked to B’s ex-girlfriend to ask her my questions. I will ask: will she tell her possible “future husband” the truth that their marriage is only a veil? Can her “future husband” recognizes and allow the existence of her relationship with B? If not recognized, will she divorce or keep living like a “normal” people? B’s story is not new. The fundamental reason to B’s ex-girlfriend wants to marry is her mother. In other words, filial piety or the identity of a daughter overwhelms her identity of an individual person. Like B said, filial piety is a cangue that people have to carry it very long time. Another interview is about Y and her girlfriend, which is different from B’s. Y’s girlfriend, who lives in the states as well as Y. Whenever she goes back home, her parents always want her to meet and hang out with different young men. Y says:

“I don’t want her to attend such matchmaking, but I can’t control that. I understand why her parents are so eagerly to find her a husband, because both of us are 27 and

⁶⁷ Interview was taken through phone on May 9th. 2017.

she is turning 28 soon. We are already *shengnü*.”⁶⁸

From the above two interviews, family pressure like filial piety is the largest stone that block their ways. However, no matter B or Y, they clearly know that they could not circumvent their parents. B told me, “I can get rid of my parents as long as I can stay in the states. But, is it worth?” To be honest, as a part of Chinese LGBT community, I could not give her an answer. Or this question has no answer at all. If B’s ex-girlfriend believed heteronormality and filial piety are heavier, then she would choose heterosexual marriage and stay with her parents. If B wanted to stay in the U.S to keep this relationship, there could many possible ways, but her question is, worthy or not? Separated from her parents and lived abroad by herself, I believe that is not possible to her. The ambiguity of the future makes the relationship of homosexuals even more vulnerable. B is in the east coast of the states, and her ex-girlfriend is in China. “Long distance is the worst.” B said. However, Y is luckier than B. Both Y and her girlfriend could have working visas, which could sponsor and help them to stay in the U.S. “My girlfriend’s father will stay here for a while. I have to conceal our relationship.” Y sighed. “But we decided to *chugui*⁶⁹ after we received our working visas.” When I asked Y if she was forced to marry, would she agree. She answered firmly: “No. I don’t need it.” The working visa, both allows them to legally stay and supports their living expenses. In other words, *xinghun* is not necessary in Y’s case, because they have the capital of living independently. However, B’s ex-girlfriend has considered *xinghun*. One is because she is in China, more or less influenced by the large environment. Another reason is when B and her were having the conversation, they were both college students then. They were not independent

⁶⁸ Interview was taken through phone on May 9th. 2017.

⁶⁹ See “Special Terms” at the beginning of this article.

from their family, so they might not have the freedom of choice. Economically independent is crucial to individuals especially Chinese LGBT people who want *chugui*. With the economic independence, one can live by oneself and no longer rely on their parents, who may use money to “control” them.

Conclusion

It is not surprised to find criticism towards *xinghun*, such as Lao-ou, a sixty-year-old “consultant of coming-out” writes:

“*Xinghun* cannot last life-long. You must wear a mask in front of everybody to sustain this fake marriage. How do you know in the future everything will not change? I am an old person. I see how Chinese people have changed from parents-arranged marriage to free love. I see China has changed from asceticism during the Culture Revolution to the liberation of sex in the 1990s. I have already realized the trend of legalizing same-sex marriage is unstoppable. People change every ten years. I believe same-sex marriage will be legalized soon if Chinese LGBT people work together.”⁷⁰

However, I think sometimes criticism to *xinghun* is inappropriate. They do not deserve harsh comments because of personal choice. LGBT people who choose *xinghun* have already lived in struggles, fears, and guilty, why are they still being hurt by criticism from their LGBT comrades? China is developing, however people can not estimate how many years will China take to legalize same-sex marriage. So, *xinghun* is working as a transition that connects traditional heterosexual marriage and the future new form of marriage. Chinese LGBT people who practice *xinghun* are not simply compromising to the tradition, they are trying to reconcile the contradiction happened around them, and looking for a better life style for themselves. Even in the Western world, *xinghun* still exists. No matter how advanced and literate the society is, there would be a part of conservative parents who oppose same-sex marriage and only accept heterosexual marriage. Harsh criticism could also divide the LGBT

⁷⁰ Lao, Ou. “Formal Marriage In LGBT Group.” (Taiwan: Wanyou Publish.Co. 2012.) p437.

community.⁷¹ These LGBT people are in China, a conservative country with thousands of years of Confucianism that deeply rooted in this land. To be honest, growing up under this environment, it is hard to get rid of it. LGBT movement is liberation of human rights. Human rights include the right of freedom of choice. To the Chinese LGBT people who choose *xinghun*, they have made their own decisions. They do not deserve criticism that criticizes them as cheaters. Personally, I do not fully support *xinghun* as a solution of same-sex marriage. However, I can not simply point my finger to my *tongzhi* and judge their *xinghun* like some critics did. As a part of the Chinese LGBT community, we should understand our *tongzhi*⁷², not just criticize them. Thinking globally, no matter in the West or in the Asia, like South Korea,⁷³ “cooperative marriage” has its market. Asian-Pacific region shares similar ideology together. Problems that Chinese LGBT people meet, could happen in other Asian societies as well. Studying *xinghun* in China, could be a study case to other Asian-Pacific countries.

⁷¹ I have a discussion with my second reader, Professor Amy Sueyoshi, who is a professor of gender and ethnic studies in San Francisco State University.

⁷² Here, *tongzhi* means both LGBT and comrade.

⁷³ Cho, John Song Pae. “The Wedding Banquet Revisited: ‘Contract Marriage’ between Korean Gays and Lesbians” (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: 2009)

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多少。对他们有利用价值的女性，他们也不会对她们真心地好，既然是留着来用的，当然是最大限度地剥削她们...我还要提醒一下诸位，就算是L E S离婚，异性恋同妻要遇到的离婚难题，一样一点不少地会落到L E S头上——法律不承认形婚，L E S和G A Y的形婚协议没有半点法律效力和保障，就算是事先说好了，人家婚后就是不遵守你能拿他怎样？更别提他可能会为了生育而不择手段（家暴或强奸妻子），这种案例也不是没有。”

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